

# JENISON HISTORY

June 2015

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[www.jenisonhistory.org](http://www.jenisonhistory.org)

JENISON HISTORICAL  
ASSOCIATION  
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## THE STORY OF THE VAN WALLIN HOUSE AND WALLIN FAMILY

Coming from England in 1836, the Erie Canal provided a waterway to the West and Michigan for the Wallin's. The trip west from Detroit was through unbroken forests with stops to clean the road of fallen timber. Men walked most of the time; women and children occupied the lumber wagons. There was some annoyance from Indians. The Wallin's first home was a log cabin of one room near the present city of Buchanan, Michigan. They were plagued with the ague, fever and mosquitoes.

In 1848, Van's grandfather, Dr. C.C. Wallin, bought a tannery where Van's father, Franklin, had worked the previous three years. C.C. Wallin continued his work as a doctor of medicine.

The area near Saugatuck, Michigan (at that time called the "Flats") became the Wallin's next home. They bought a tannery there partly due to the hemlock trees that were best for the tanning process. They got bark for the tanning process as far away as Ottawa County.

In some areas, the tanneries preceded the sawmill due to the need for leather shoes, harnesses and saddles. Van's Uncle

Our mission is to learn about Jenison history, obtain artifacts relating to its history, and maintain the Jenison Historical Museum as a place to share and display our heritage.

**June Open House  
June 20, 2015  
2-4 P.M.**

**Check out these pictures and many more  
of the life and times of John J. Piers at  
the Open House on Saturday June 20th.**



*Clockwise from top: John J Piers , circa 1918;  
John J Piers, Virginia (Timmer) and Bea, circa  
1930's; John J. and Tilda Piers, circa 1920*



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## (CON'T)

Thomas renamed the small town where they lived “Dingleville” because everyone’s grazing cows wore bells with different sounds so owners could identify them. The cows “dingled” out in the morning and “dingled” back at night.

Van’s father, Franklin B. Wallin, was called “Deacon Wallin” as he helped organize (January of 1860) the first church in the village of Saugatuck. He was also active in the organization of the Saugatuck Cemetery where the Wallin’s, including Van A. Wallin, are buried.

Because Franklin had broken a leg and could not enter the army with his younger brothers, he was elected representative to the “War Legislature” of 1861.

After selling the tannery, the Wallin’s moved to Chicago and built a tannery there. During the Chicago fire, October 9, 1871, the Wallin’s had to vacate their tannery. The fire was at the front door and they were moving bundles of leather, office things, etc., out the back door and across the river. They restarted their business at 53 South Canal Street.

Moving back to Dingleville/ Saugatuck area, the Wallin’s re-

established their tannery business in 1879-80. In October, 1881, Van’s father moved the family to Grand Rapids. After 30 years the Wallin’s Dingleville tannery closed.

In 1881, the Wallin Leather Company, a Michigan Corporation, was formed. Nearly all of the stock was owned by Van’s father, grandfather and uncle. The plant began operation in 1882 and made only sole

leather for footwear. The bark for tanning came from Northern and Upper Michigan.

Earlier, Van had been sent to Grand Rapids to attend school and lived with Mr. and Mrs. Hanchett, uncle and aunt of Benjamin S. Hanchett, Jr. who, with his wife Bessie, turned out to be neighbors of the Wallin’s in Jenison. Van attended Grand Rapids Business School to study bookkeeping. In 1883, Van started as bookkeeper in the Wallin Leather Co. office at \$9 a week.

In Grand Rapids, Van saw electric street lights for the first time. At that time the belief was that electric lights were too unreliable to be used indoors so gas lights were used inside.

There were horse-drawn streetcars. Electric ones came later.

On June 21, 1893, Van A. Wallin married Lily Whittelsey. They honeymooned at the Chicago World’s Fair. V.A. died in 1942 and Lily died in the early 1950’s.

The auto replaced horses to some extent by 1906. Van’s first car, a 1903-4 Oldsmobile proved to be unreliable. He was advised to not stray too far with the car. There were no concrete or asphalt roads, only bank gravel and toll roads which were privately owned.

In 1905 the Wallin Tannery became part of a larger organization, but they didn’t sell the name of their company. The sign “C.C. Wallin & Sons” first hung in 1851 was taken down. Van Wallin was involved with the organization and administration of the National Association of Tanners, was Director of Central Leather Company and President of Wallin Leather company. Van spent a lot of time in Washington, DC during Taft’s and Wilson’s administrations and lived in Washington with his family several months.

In 1917, the Wallin’s bought 230 acres along the Grand River and

## (CON'T)

named it “Wallinwood Farm.” This acreage he purchased from the Boynton’s. It was located along 10th Avenue in Jenison. Ten years later, the Wallin’s bought the old George Weatherwax farm of 140 acres adjoining the property he had previously purchased.

The Weatherwax property included a house, built in the 1850’s, and a barn. The Wallin’s rebuilt the house in 1928 and moved from Chicago in April 17, 1929 to their new “Country Estate which they renamed “Wallinwood Springs.”

The architect who designed the renovation won an award for its design in 1929 which led to the Ladies Home Journal, a national magazine, to do a feature article on the home. The article was published in 1930 and the Schellenbergs are grateful for the generosity of Frances Wallin Shaw, granddaughter of Van A. Wallin, who gave the 1930 issue to them.

Robert Shaw, his wife, Frances, and their children also lived in the house for a brief time. Robert Shaw was an attorney in Grandville.

In 1990 a subsequent feature article was done on the home

after Kathleen Schellenberg sent a letter to the Ladies Home Journal, explaining the recent acquisition of the 1930 issue.

Second generation Wallin’s, Franklin and Agnes Wallin, moved into the home in the early 1950’s. They made some renovations and changed the kitchen to the standard of the day, red and white.

The home and surrounding 300 acres, as well as three other residences, were held in the Wallin family for three generations from 1917 to 1985 when Dirk and Gretchen Nyenhuis approached Robert and Francis Shaw with a plan for developing the property. Originally, the Nyenhuises sought to purchase only several acres, but the terms of the Wallin wills specifically stated that the property was to be sold in its entirety and only if no heir of the Wallin’s contested the sale.

The Nyenhuises drew up plans for the development of the 300-plus acreage which included condominiums and a golf course. The Shaws were pleased with the integrity demonstrated by the Nyenhuis plan and gave them permission to use the “Wallinwood” name that Van A. Wallin gave to his “Country

Estate,” as the name for the development.

The Schellenbergs were business partners of the Nyenhuises early in the development, but have since sold their interest, yet retained their lot and home.

Interesting features of the home include beams from the Weatherwax barn, used in the living room ceiling, and a central staircase and foyer. The home boasts a large dining room, living room, four bedrooms, plus a first-floor study/media room. The Schellenbergs have renovated the kitchen, but the majority of the house remains the “Dutch Colonial” style as it was when the Wallin’s lived there

## Sources:

V.A. Wallin, The Michigan Wallin’s, from Stratford-on-Avon 1791 to “Wallinwood-on-the-Grand,” 1933. Toren Printing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Robert & Kathleen Schellenberg, This Old House, brochure.

Letter from Frances Shaw, Dec., 11, 2000.



## June 2015

### John J. Piers

May and June we are featuring John J. Piers, manager of Ben and Bessie Hanchett's properties in and around Jenison.

## July 2015

### Riverboat Tour

In July, we will be taking our annual historic riverboat tour on the Grand Lady that sails out of Jenison on the Grand River. If you come, be sure to watch for the Eagles! See flyer on page 5 for more information. Tickets must be purchased in advance.

## September 2015

### Photo display of Downtown Jenison

We are working on a photo display of the Downtown Jenison area.

## MUSEUM HAPPENINGS

### Considering Membership in JHA?

If you are not a dues paying member, please consider joining to help support the Association. Dues are a bargain at only \$10 per year, you will receive monthly updates to the happenings of the Association. Contact the JHA at [info@jenisonhistory.org](mailto:info@jenisonhistory.org), or call the museum at 616-457-4398. We look forward to seeing you,

### Web Site:

Keep up to date by stopping by our website for a list of the our meeting and Open House dates and times by visiting ([www.jenisonhistory.org](http://www.jenisonhistory.org))

### Museum Notes

If you have been by the museum in the last few months, you probably have noticed the transformation of the gardens around the house. One of our

newest members, Sandy Wensink, took a look at the grounds, and found where she could make a difference. Sandy has done a wonderful job transforming the beds back into a think of beauty!

### Can you find this artifact?



In your visit to the museum, keep an eye out for this artifact. How close does it look to the current version used in our homes?

## VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

**Museum Cleaning:** This is a big job, as you can well imagine, that needs constant attention in order to have the museum look it's best during the open houses. Contact any board member if you can lend a few hours.

**Newsletter:** Interested in helping publish? Research articles?

**Tour Guides:** The school tours are a great way of teaching the children about our history and is such a rewarding experience. You won't regret being a part of this experience for our local children.

Joyce Klawiter would love to hear from you.

### And the list goes on...

Monthly Open Houses, Theme's for Open Houses, Inventory, Museum Maintenance, board trustee.

You can come to a monthly meeting or reach out to any board member if you would like to volunteer in any particular area.


## March/April Open House

**JENISON HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION IS HOSTING**

**HISTORIC  
RIVERBOAT TOUR  
ON THE GRAND LADY**

**SATURDAY, JULY 18, 2015  
12-2 PM  
775 TAYLOR ST \* JENISON, MI  
\$10 PER PERSON \* UNDER 2 YRS - FREE**

**BRING A LUNCH BUT DRINKS MUST BE PURCHASED ON THE BOAT**



**SEND REQUESTS FOR TICKETS TO  
LIZ TIMMER  
7665 THOMAS AVE \* JENISON, MI 49428  
616-457-3708**

INCLUDE A CHECK OR MONEY ORDER PAYABLE TO JENISON HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION  
WITH THE NUMBER OF TICKETS YOU NEED.  
ALL ORDERS SHOULD INCLUDE AN EMAIL ADDRESS OR PHONE NUMBER FOR TICKET ORDER CONFIRMATION.  
ALL TICKETS WILL BE DISTRIBUTED THE DAY OF THE TOUR AT THE RIVERBOAT LANDING.  
ORDERS NEED TO BE RECEIVED BY JULY 14, 2014.  
TICKETS ARE NON-REFUNDABLE.  
TICKETS MUST BE PURCHASED IN ADVANCE.  
NO TICKET SALES WILL BE AVAILABLE THE DAY OF THE TOUR

**COME VISIT THE TIFFANY HOUSE MUSEUM AFTER THE BOAT TOUR FROM 2:30 TO 4 PM**

## For Sale at the Museum

Jenison Museum Note Pads	\$ 1.50	Souvenir Ornament: 2014	\$15.00
Stationary with Envelopes	\$ 2.00	Souvenir Ornament: 2012	\$12.00
Book: Bend in the River	\$10.00	Purchase one of each ornament for \$25	
Book: At the Bend	\$ 4.00		
Mill Print (unframed)	\$10.00		
Jenison at the Bend CD	\$10.00		
Historical Prints:			
Large	\$10.00		
Small	\$ 7.50		
Pencils (neon colors or wood)	\$ .25		



Available during any open house, or call the Museum at 457-4398

## JHA TRUSTEE'S

### Chair/Membership

Liz Timmer (16)  
457-3708

### Vice Chair/Curator/Tours

Ken Williams (17)  
772.6523

### Treasurer/Editor

Ruth Lowing (17)  
896-1447

### Social Secretary

Nellie DeLaat (16)  
457-1193

### Recording Secretary

Linda Droog (15)  
457-3016

### Co-Archivist

Barb Semeyn (17)  
457-9343

### Maintenance/Historian

Mike Timmer (16)  
531-1218

### Trustee

Yvonne Williams (14)  
772-6523  
Gene Kort (16)  
534-6769

### Township Rep

Ron Villerius

(##) = year of re-election to the board

**Contact Information:** Members may contact the board at the above phone numbers or leave a message at 457-4398 or [info@jenisonhistory.org](mailto:info@jenisonhistory.org)

### Organization Membership in the Historical Association of Michigan

Find us on the registry at  
[www.hsmichigan.org](http://www.hsmichigan.org)



Jenison Historical Association  
PO Box 664  
Jenison, MI 49429

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### 2015 Meeting Schedule

Meetings are all open to the public and held on the **3rd Thursday** of the month at 6:45 PM at the Georgetown Library, unless noted. No meeting in December.

June 18, 2015

July, 16, 2015

August, 20, 2015

September 17, 2015

October 15, 2015

November 19, 2015

**All meetings begin at 6:45 PM unless noted**

### 2014 Museum Open House Schedule

Saturday, Open House schedule

June 20, 2015

July 18, 2015 (2:30 PM - 4 PM, after the Riverboat cruise)

September 19, 2015

October 17, 2015

December 5, 2015

January 9, 2016

ALSO: 1st Tuesday of the month April thru November -  
10 AM - Noon